

# Syphilis

“pox” or “syph”

Syphilis is a very serious disease. Contact with the sores of an infected person during sex is the main way it is passed from one person to another. It can also be passed from a pregnant woman to her baby.

## Signs and symptoms

Syphilis is a complicated and serious disease and symptoms change during different stages of the disease.

### First stage

About 3 weeks after sex, a single, painless sore called a chancre (shan-ker) appears on the body. It is usually on the penis, anus, cervix, or mouth, but it can appear anywhere. A chancre can look like a sore from another disease, including another STD. With syphilis there is only one sore. It doesn't hurt and it is usually hard around the edges. The sore is very contagious, which means you can give other people syphilis.

### Second stage

If syphilis isn't treated during the first stage, it moves to the second stage. In 6 or 7 weeks, infected people develop a rash on the palms of the hands, soles of the feet, and other parts of the body. This rash is contagious. You may feel like you have the flu. These symptoms go away in about 2 weeks but, if you aren't treated, serious damage can start happening inside your brain, heart, and other organs.

### Third or latent stage

There are no symptoms and you aren't contagious in the third stage. Hidden damage gets worse until treatment or death.

## Testing

A blood test is done to find the large spiral-shaped germs (spirochete) that cause syphilis. The sores can also be tested. If you have had sex with someone who has syphilis, you must be tested and treated right away. Tests may need to be done more than once.

## Treatment

A special penicillin is given as a shot which kills the germs. It can be given at any stage and prevents further damage. You can get syphilis again if you have sex with an infected person.

Pregnant women are tested for syphilis during prenatal care. Both the mother and the baby can be treated and cured during pregnancy.

## Prevention

- **Know your sex partners**—go with them for STD tests.
- **Use condoms correctly every time you have sex.**
- **Have fewer sex partners.** The more partners you have, the greater your chances of getting syphilis.
- **Birth control pills do not prevent infection.**

## Learn more about syphilis

If you have questions or need more information, contact your doctor, local health department, or community clinic, or call the National STD Hotline at **1-800-227-8922**.

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